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19 January 1982

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Responding to Floggers in Cuba

1. We have no major substantive disagreement with the information contained in the attached memorandum to the President. We would note, however, that MIG-21s can also be equipped to deliver nuclear weapons. Although the MIG-23 has greater range and payload capabilities than the MIG-21, it seems likely that the Soviet response to our actions will include assertions that the arrival of MIG-23s does not alter the status quo.
2. We agree with the draft memorandum that increased US military activity around Cuba will heighten Havana's concerns, but it is unlikely to lead to the removal of the MIG-23 aircraft already delivered. To the extent that the issue becomes public, the likelihood of their removal will become even more remote.
3. It should also be noted that a sharp increase in US military activity around Cuba may provoke a miscalculation on the part of the Castro regime. The Cuban armed forces could misinterpret the situation and launch an attack against a US naval vessel in or near Cuban territorial waters. Such an event occurred in May 1980 when Cuban air force planes mistakenly sunk a Bahamian patrol craft while in Bahamian territorial waters. Shortly afterwards Cuban jets harassed a US helicopter searching for survivors.
4. Concerning the use of SR-71 overflights of Cuba, it should be noted that these flights will not improve the quality of intelligence information on the MIG-23s. They will be viewed in Havana, however, as another sign of US hostility. Castro has on several occasions reserved the right to attempt to shoot down an SR-71 overflight. In the context of increased US military activity, Castro may order Cuban SAMs to fire on the SR-71. Such an attempt has little chance of success, but will create the need for an appropriate US response.
5. Finally, we agree with the draft memorandum's recommendation that a low profile be followed in the public sector. If the US does not expect to achieve the removal of the MIG-23s, care should be taken that the actions selected do not create false expectations that the US goal is the removal of the aircraft.

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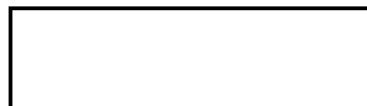
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REMARKS

Bob,

The comments on the memorandum were prepared by [] Chief, Cuba-Caribbean Branch, ALA. We have retained one copy of the comments in ALA. We did not reproduce the memorandum.



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Meeting on Cuba
19 January 82
1300

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